DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 994 CS 006 923

AUTHOR Duncan, Patricia H.; Goggin, William F.
TITLE A Profile of the Lifetime Reader: Implications for Instruction and Resource Utilization.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association (26th, Philadelphia, PA, October 28-30, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Developmental Stages; Early Reading; Educational Resources; *Older Adults; *Reading Attitudes; *Reading Habits; Reading Instruction; *Reading Interests; *Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS *Lifelong Readers

ABSTRACT

To identify the profile of the active older reader, indepth taped interviews were conducted with 23 retired individuals for whom reading was an important part of daily living experience. Demographic data indicated that the highest education level attained varied from grammar school to a master's degree. Developmentally, the lifetime reader demonstrated an early interest in reading. Impressions of recalled reading instruction included learning by the whole word method, instruction using adventure stories, and time spent in free reading corners of the classroom. The mother was influential as a model and as the person who most frequently read to the child. Favorite childhood books included fairy tales, adventure and series books, and many children's classics. Reading interests and patterns of the young and middle years were similar to the subjects' current reading behaviors. Early morning reading was favored by 53% with bedtime reading enjoyed by 43% of the group. Categories of fiction most frequently identified were historical novels, best sellers, and mystery and suspense. Biography and history were clear nonfiction preferences. Regardless of cost or transportation, all knew how and where to get the types of materials they wanted to read. An interesting revelation was that the readers preferred an intimate sharing of reading, preferably with relatives and close friends. Implications drawn from the profile suggest possible modifications of current teaching and organizational strategies which might foster lifelong reading habits. (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED223994

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

A Profile of the Lifetime Reader: Implications for Instruction and Resource Utilization

Patricia H. Duncan
Virginia Commonwealth University

and

William F. Goggin
Virginia Commonwealth University

A paper presented at the Twenty-Sixth College Reading Association Annual Conference, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 28, 1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia H. Duncan

William F. Goggin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS506923

Building lifetime reading habits is a universally-accepted goal; however, the steps toward attainment of that goal are not readily apparent. Our study (Duncan & Goggin, 1981) attempted to profile the active reader in retirement and to identify those patterns of behavior which permitted maintenance of interest in reading throughout a lifetime. We hypothesized that by identifying the characteristics that make lifelong reading a pleasurable activity we may acquire some insight into the kind of learning environments that foster the reading habit. This paper seeks to identify the profile of the active older reader, to draw implications from the profile for creating better reading environments and to suggest ways that retired persons can be used more effectively as educational resources.

During the 1981-82 academic year, we conducted in-depth taped interviews with 23 retired individuals for whom reading was an important part of daily living experience. Unlike previous studies by Moshey (1972), Sharon (1974), Watson (1979), Ngandu and O'Rourke (1979) and Ribovich and Erikson (1980) which surveyed and analyzed random samples of retirees, our investigation focused specifically on individuals who read regularly and for whom reading was an important part of life. The 60-90 minute taped interviews permitted us to gather information accurately using an autobiographical technique. The taping also provided an analysis of the nuances and affect coloring an individual's response, thereby increasing the opportunities to analyze the behavioral patterns described.

PROFILING THE ACTIVE OLDER READER

Demographic Information

The readers in our study orginated from all regions of the country except for the far west. The highest education level attained varied from grammar school (4) to master's degree (6). Eleven of our 23 subjects indicated that they continued to participate in learning experiences beyond their formal education. Career choices varied widely for both men and women. Social activities also ranged widely and in some instances paralleled hobbies and interests other than reading. Only three of the 23 individuals interviewed reported memberships in organizations designed for retired persons.

In addition to an interest in reading, the subjects also identified 24 types of activities as avocations. The theater, art, music, handiwork and travel were popular pastimes. Most of the subjects felt that they were in reasonably good health, although a majority (17) reported health problems. Visual problems, fatigue and arthritis seemed to be the physical conditions which influenced reading.

Developmental Patterns

Typically the lifetime reader demonstrated an early interest in reading and took pride in being able to read and write independently. Impressions of reading instruction recalled included learning by the "whole word" method, instruction using adventure stories and time spent in free reading corners of the classroom.

As might be expected, the mother was influential in early reading development as a model and as the person who most frequently read to the child.

Family read-together times, home libraries, books received as gifts and early exposure to the public library were mentioned as other significant influences of the home on the young reader. Favorite childhood books remembered included fairy tales, adventure and series books, and many children's classics. Adolescent interests and tastes expanded to include popular fiction (sometimes with sexual themes) and a growing interest in history and historical fiction.

Reading interests and patterns of the young and middle adult years were similar to the subjects' current reading behaviors. A slightly increased interest in contemporary fiction, romantic novels, and career-related materials was recalled for that period. Habitual times for reading became established during these years and continued into retirement years. Regular use of libraries had been established and continued to be an important part of the adult reading routine. Idiosyncratic patterns also developed during this period for some readers. These patterns persisted into retirement.

Active Reading in Retirement

Daily reading was a universal routine for our subjects. Nine of them said that they read anytime they could; however, they frequently identified preferred times. Early morning reading was favored by 53% of the group with bedtime reading enjoyed by 43% of the group. Late night reading was reported by five women. This last pattern seemed to be either a habit carried over from the child rearing years or a method of coping with the discomfort of arthritis.

Kinds of Materials Being Read by Older Readers

The newspaper was one of the most popular reading materials - - the morning paper being preferred. Magazines were read by 78% of the subjects, although only 43% reported subscribing to magazines. Cost was a factor in subscription purchase.

A consistent pattern of preference for fiction or non-fiction did not emerge for this group. Categories of fiction most frequently identified were historical novels, best sellers and mystery/suspense. Biography and history were clear non-fiction preferences.

Currently the 23 subjects read 35 different types of magazines and one professional journal. Most of the retired professional persons dropped their professional affiliations and reduced their professional reading. At the same time they increased their reading in books and periodicals related to avocational interests.

Access to Reading Materials

Access to materials was a minor problem for these active older readers. Regardless of cost or transportation, they knew how and where to get the types of materials they wanted to read. Few individuals had room for extensive libraries in their present living arrangements; consequently, books and magazines were in continuous flow from library to reader or from reader to friend or relative. The most common sources for reading materials were the public library (74%), direct purchase (65%), exchange with friends and relatives (43%), and residential libraries (39%). Paperbacks were viewed by some as a significant aid to acquisition.

For the subjects in our study, reading was shared in a fairly intimate manner, primarily with friends or relatives. Only five of the 23 individuals

participated in a monthly reading group and interest in reading groups was not strong. A common view expressed was that it was difficult to find someone with exactly the same interests and tastes in reading.

Reading Purposes and Values for Older Readers

The purposes and values for reading appeared to be consistent throughout the life span for our subjects. Primary motivations for reading were pleasure or entertainment and to gain information. Frequent responses to the question, "What makes a book good for you?" included the appreciation of writing style, an engrossing subject and well-developed characters. Responses to the question about reading as a sustained interest and pastime suggested that reading provides vicarious experience, satisfies curiosity, gives insight into the human conditions and furnishes companionship. Several subjects felt that there might be a predisposed tendency to be a reader.

IMPLICATIONS DRAWN FROM THE PROFILE OF THE LIFETIME ACTIVE READERS FOR IMPROVING YOUNG READERS ENVIRONMENTS

Early Experiences

The profile of the developing lifetime reader confirms the professional value of early home reinforcement of reading. Although the mother was a significant model for our subjects, the current role of reading model could be expanded to include the primary care giver - - father, grandparent, day care agent, etc. What appears to be important is the consistency over time of an individual who routinely engages in personal reading in view of the child and who reads regularly to the child. Programs for the education of parents and primary care givers of young children would do well to include

instruction on how to institute reading time in family groupings in school, agency or home settings. Encouraging paperback books as gifts and as a starter for home libraries are reasonable activities for most parents, even those of modest means. Establishing routine visitation to the public library is another idea that should be given consideration in pre-school and early education programs planning.

It was reassuring to observe the stability of children's classics as significant influences in the development of a lifetime reading habit. This gives us added impetus to continue to include these books as well as current children's literature possessing strong themes and characters among our classroom libraries and our read-aloud choices. Among our group were a number of individuals who delighted in re-reading their favorite stories, including the classics they enjoyed as children. Teacher could capitalize on this behavior by suggesting that students re-read their favorite stories for different purposes or to gain added insights into theme and characterization. Critical analysis for older students may be more comfortable when approached initially through a well-written children's classic. A good example of this is Kenneth Graham's Wind in the Willows. Third graders enjoy the surface plot and delightful characters when the story is used for read-aloud activity. At sixth or seventh grade, students appreciate the writing style, the depth of character development and the anthropomorphic presentations of personality.

The time for expanded interests in reading and peak reading activity for our subjects was during early adolescence. This confirms Witty and Kopel's observations (in Ashley, 1970) but is in contrast to more recent studies of

the development of reading interests (Ashley, 1970; Dowan, 1971) which suggest that the child's range of interest peaks earlier in the ten to eleven stage. Attention to historical fiction, biography, and selected popular novels appears to be worthwhile for encouraging expanding interests and tastes at this level. Active readers develop a curiosity about human issues during emerging adolescence and find satisfaction in reading history, biography and contemporary books which suggest answers or offer new insights into problems. This curiosity persists throughout life for the readers in our study.

Home and school environments for reading might be modified to include several organizational patterns which are preferred by active lifetime readers. A personal place for reading was important in early reading for our subjects and continued through to retirement. This would suggest that classrooms and home settings should arrange attractive "private corners" for independent reading and use time spent there as "rewarding" activities. Establishing routine times for pleasure reading seems to be another important characteristic of the lifetime reader. Perhaps instructional organizational patterns should allow for several optional times for daily free reading and might encourage consistency of behavior once a preference is established. We speculate that school settings are not presently ready to accommodate such idiosyncratic behaviors as reading between assignments, reading at lunch, or reading in the lavatory; yet, idiosyncratic routines were well-established patterns for some of the most voracious readers in our study. Planned instruction which incorporates fiction, non-fiction and the use of periodicals encourages exposure to a wide range of reading materials. This should be a focus of discipline instruction as well as regular reading instruction. Because the newspaper is such a valued reading resource throughout the lives of active

readers, it would seem that more attention should be directed toward the newspaper as a teaching resource. Also, planned time to share the sports page, comics and homemaker pages can help younger students to learn more about the newspaper and to enjoy the varieties of information presented.

An interesting revelation from our study was that the readers we interviewed preferred an intimate sharing of reading, preferably with relatives and close friends. For our group reading was generally more personal than social. Teachers may want to consider this phenomenon when planning reading lessons. Sharing stories in dyads, triads or in individual conferences with a teacher or tutor may be as effective as time spent in the reading group checking comprehension. These variations used occasionally may provide experiences which are more compatible with later adult modes of responding to reading.

Because vision (or deficits in vision) tend to influence reading in later life, it would seem that early attention to reading in good light is warranted. Sloane and Kraut (1975) emphasize the need of older citizens for increased reading light and suggest the use of good light as well as compensatory techniques. It may be wise to encourage readers of all ages to read in light of appropriate intensity and angle and to use flexible reading techniques, such as skimming and scanning for increased reading efficiency.

THE ACTIVE RETIRED READER AS AN EDUCATION RESOURCE

The retired person has been considered a likely candidate for service as a teacher aid or tutor. Cassidy (1981) suggests that "grey power" will be

an important school resource in the 80's; yet his suggestions for the use of the older citizen as tutor or aid do not consider the unique needs and interests of the retired active reader. It is assumed, for example, that retired professional teachers are the best types of tutors and that they wish to continue to be actively involved in the profession. Our retired professionals (including teachers) usually chose to set aside their professional involvement, preferring to devote their time and energy to avocational interests. Schools might keep this in mind as they seek retired persons as resources. Assistance in developing and extending hobbies such as theater, crafts, and travel may be as valuable to children as direct instruction in basic skills because this kind of help exposes them to lifestyles and interests beyond their current experience.

Cassidy (1981) and others suggest that volunteer tutors must make a commitment to regular attendance and necessary preservice training. These are generally good guidelines; however, some retired persons who could be very effective as tutors have physical conditions which do not permit them the luxury of a regular commitment. Transportation is also a hardship for those who do not drive a car and have limited access to public transportation. Alternative ways for using retired persons as teaching resources might include a "flex-time" sponsorship whereby students are matched with retirees for a variety of projects. Each invests a portion of time and concern in the other person during activities, such as help with an assignment, learning to knit, or taking nature walks. The Girl Scouts of America organization is using this model pairing Brownies with retired scouts. In a period of two-career families, this type of system may also provide the child with the extra attention that parents no longer have time to give. Retired

teachers of young children may also find tutoring adults more to their liking as a volunteer activity. With adults, the tutors would have more opportunities to share current interests. Older adult tutees may also appreciate more fully a tutor who is at a similar age level and who can relate to their problems and concerns.

Aside from the typical responsibilities as aids in making instructional materials, retired volunteers who are active readers could give valuable service in such activities as taping stories for listening activities, serving as resource persons for oral history experiences, planning and participating in career education projects or sharing their special interests and expertise with students who are developing similar interests and skills. In mentor-type roles they can give students the confirmation of purpose and the security required to explore new areas of learning.

Agencies and organizations such as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), and the National Association of Retired Teachers (NART) are often cited as sources for volunteer older citizens; however, in our study only three of the 23 persons interviewed held memberships in organizations designed for retired persons. This may indicate the need for school leadership to do a more personal canvassing of the community in order to identify retired persons who have the talents, skills, and motivation to serve as classroom resources.

Our survey of older active readers profiled lifetime reading. Implications drawn from the profile confirmed many of the factors believed to influence the development of good readers. Several suggestions emerged as possible modifications of current teaching and organizational strategies which might foster lifetime reading habits. Older readers themselves can

serve as a model for guiding instruction. Schools can find many new ways to use these people as educational aids. Students will be the ones who benefit from the unique perspective retired persons can give to the learning situation.

Bibliography

Ashley, L. Children's reading interests and individualized reading. Elementary English, December 1970, 1088-1096.

Cassidy, J. Grey power in the reading program - a direction for the eighties. Reading Teacher, 1981, 35, 287-291.

Dowan, T. Personal reading interests as expressed by children in grades three, four, and five in selected Florida public schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, 1971.

Duncan, P. & Goggin W. Reading habits, patterns and interests of older active readers. ERIC/Reading and Communication Skills, December, 1981, 18 p. ED 209 654.

Moshey, K. The retired adult reader: His reading interests and choices and the readability levels of them. M.Ed. Thesis, Rutgers University, 1972, 130 p. ED 064 674.

Ngandu, K. & O'Rourke, B. Reading attitudes, habits, interests, and motivations of the elderly. 23rd Annual Conference, College Reading Association, Boston, Massachusetts, November 1979, ED 181 416.

Ribovich, J. & Erikson, L. A study of lifelong reading with implications for instructional programs. Journal of Reading, 1980, 24, 20-26.

Sharon, A. What do adults read? Reading Research Quarterly, 1973-74, 9, 147-169.

Sloane, A. & Kraut, J. The pleasure of reading need not diminish with age. Geriatrics, 1975, 30, 117.

Watson, D. et al. Describing and improving reading strategies of elderly readers. The University of Missouri, Columbia, HEW, Administration on Aging, 1979, ED 182 724.